

National Junior High Sunday 2021

“Build Wisely” based on Matthew 7:24

Bible study

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When I was in 10th grade, a school friend of mine was killed in a car accident. After meeting with the yearbook club, she was driving across the highway, when another car ran a red light and struck her vehicle. This loss was tragic to many of us in our small high school, and it set me back for a few days. I know the event is still as devastating to her family to this day. At the time of shock, nobody knew what to do, or who to talk to. Word got around that a local church was holding a candlelight vigil to anyone who wanted to come. I do not remember if her family was present, but I do know that the sanctuary was filled with at least 100 teenagers. At one point, I remember holding a candle as everyone stood around the sanctuary, remembering our innocent friend in silence. It was not something I would wish on anyone, but a moment that I will not forget because as we stood there thinking about our sudden loss, the setting reminded me that God is just as present to us that day as God has been present to us every day before. I looked around the room and saw everyone holding a single candle, reminding me of the light metaphor at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14-16). Finally, I was encouraged that even through this ‘storm’ in my life, God’s love has not changed. God loves the soul that died that day, and God loves me forever.

This event made me wonder how different I would have experienced that tragic loss if I had not been formed in a community of faith that built its foundation on Christ, the solid rock. For example, if the foundation to our lives are only our friendships, what happens when our

friendships dissolve? What happens to our sense of the meaning of life when a friend dies suddenly?

God's love is the foundation that Jesus is talking about, here, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24). For the last three chapters, Jesus has been teaching lessons to his disciples about prayer, law and prophets, warnings, and spiritual practices. Jesus' sermon on the mount is a series of lessons to the disciples that following Jesus is radical to how life is understood to them already. Jesus also uses this sermon to solidify the idea that following Jesus is not only a mental action, or an idea to believe. Following Jesus requires practical action, of sharing God's love. To Jesus, is not enough to just believe in him. A follower must take action.

The kingdom of heaven looks similar - but more complete and abundant - compared to the world they currently see. All of this radical living leans on the foundation of God's radical love for us. God's love is something that cannot be changed by the circumstances of the world. God's love for us is eternal.

A solid foundation is not something that Jesus talks about to veer us away from danger. It is impossible to avoid growing pains or challenges in life. Unfortunately, we will likely know the loss of loved ones, and dear friends. The solid foundation Jesus talks about is intended to promote everlasting life and protection. Life in Christ does not protect us FROM dangers, but life in Christ protects us IN dangers. Jesus preaches to us that it is wise to build our life on and around the love of God as a way to give us life when our life challenges do come.

The second half of Matthew chapter 7 (verses 13-29) is full of warnings and dualities. Jesus talks about two gates, two prophets, two trees, two doers, two houses, etc. His focus here is on helping *us* separate from that in us which is falsely secular, falsely prophetic, or falsely evangelical. In other words, Jesus is not contrasting Christians with non-Christians. In the story of two houses, Jesus talks about two kinds of Christians. The rock foundation is there; will we build on it?

This is the climax of the entire sermon. It is the final word, and the conclusion to all Jesus has already said in the previous chapters. And in this sharp final word, Jesus' goal is to transform us into people who are ready to do every good work. We are not to only know about God's love, or to believe that Jesus can be the source of someone's joy, but rather that we should live out faith as if God is already redeeming us through Christ.

Dialogue

1. The scripture talks about bad weather coming to beat down houses that are built on different foundations. We often think of this as a metaphor for the storms (losses, setbacks, stresses) of our lives that lean on different foundations (God, hobbies, friends, material possessions).
 - What kinds of foundations are your lives built on?
 - What kinds of storms have you experienced?
 - When storms come to you in life, where was God's presence?
 - When storms come to you in life in the future, how can you remember God's steadfast loving presence?

2. Our faith must be not only a cornerstone of what goes on top (our works/fruit), but it must be structurally healthy. A healthy foundation, leads to a healthy structure. A healthy pastor leads to a healthy church. A healthy emerging adult leads to a healthy group of friends who embrace one another and others with love. What kinds of things might you do to strengthen your connection with God? How might you intentionally pay attention to your spiritual health? (Spiritual practices, worship, scripture, service work, etc.)

Activities

1. Pair up. Together with your partner, flip through the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), and pick one theme or lesson in the sermon. Talk together about why this lesson might help the disciples build their solid foundation on God's love. Finally, share what your pair talked about with the rest of the group.
2. Before the Bible Study, ask people to bring any kind of building blocks with them (for example: blocks, Lego, Jenga, etc.). Work together to use your blocks to build a high tower. As youth work together to build their tower, they may realize that it is smarter to use connecting blocks on the bottom, and then to use the loose blocks toward the top. After they finish, talk about the importance of having a strong foundation in their lives, and how we might want to prioritize what we build our lives upon. Then, brick by brick, take the tower down, and name one thing at a time, in ascending order of something in your life that is important. When you get to the strong foundation, we hope that they can name very

important foundational things. There might be many blocks, but there are also many things to prioritize. Consider spiritual practices, church events, mentors, elements of worship, etc.

Prayer

End your Bible study by building a prayer together. One person starts, laying the foundation; also designate a person to end the prayer. Then in between, others can add to the prayer.